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# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

**Forty-fourth session**
28 February–2 March 2000
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women**

**Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, the International Council of Women, the International Federation on Ageing and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; Project Concern International and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Council; and the International Women's Tribune Centre, a non-governmental organization on the Roster of the Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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### Women and decision-making

The above-mentioned non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council advocate that women and men be given equal opportunities to share power and decision-making.

Equality is a human right. Article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states that 'parties should take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Women earn less than 10 per cent of the world's income. They constitute 80 per cent of the world's poor. Only 6 per cent of government ministers are women, and women hold less than 14 per cent of the world's leading positions.

In most parts of the world, men are the key decision makers in the family, in society, in politics and in business. Inequality in the sharing of power and decision-making starts from childhood and continues throughout the lifespan. Two thirds of the world's illiterate are women, and 70 per cent of the 130 million children with no opportunity to go to school are girls.

Lack of education for girls has a double impact on gender inequality. Girls and young women who are not adequately educated are not given the tools for gender empowerment, and boys and young men who are better educated are able to exercise their power to the detriment of young women.

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Financial power is often synonymous with social and political power, and since so many women in the world are financially dependent on men they become dependent on them in every other way. Often when women do exercise their equal rights they are stigmatized by society as behaving "unwomanly". There is a fundamental and worldwide attitude towards women as inferior subordinates.

In parts of the world where girls are needed for household chores, youth organizations offer non-formal education, training and experiential learning outside school hours and when the girls are not needed for household chores.

Governments are urged to make a commitment to gender equality not only by giving women positions of leadership and power but also by ensuring that equal opportunities are available for girls and boys from birth upwards. Women will only become decision makers and leaders if there is a fundamental change in cultural attitudes towards them. Boys must be taught that girls are equal from an early age, and girls must be given opportunities to gain leadership skills throughout school and beyond.

Girls and young women should be provided with opportunities for self-training in the development of character, responsible citizenship and service in their own and world communities, and in order to achieve this young women must be involved at all levels of decision-making.

We urge Governments to:

- Ensure that girls are given equal access to primary and secondary education as boys;
- Actively support youth organizations which promote and train girls and young women as leaders and decision makers;
- Actively support youth organizations which teach boys and young men that they enjoy an equal partnership with girls and young women;
- Ensure that equal opportunities policies are put in place in all areas of employment and government;
- Legislate against gender discrimination in positions of power;
- Ensure the correct demographic proportion of women in positions of power and decision-making;
- Provide appropriate support for working mothers;
- Promote successful women leaders as examples for future generations of women.